DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 356 467 CS 011 279

AUTHOR Siegel, Janna
TITLE "Whole"-ier Than Thou!
PUB DATE 93
NOTE 8p.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120) -- Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Educational Trends; Elementary Education; Phonics; *Reading Instruction; Reading Processes; *Teacher Behavior; Teacher Role; Theory Practice Relationship; *Whole Language Approach
IDENTIFIERS *Direct Instruction; Educational Issues

ABSTRACT

No trend in education has been more exalted than "whole language," which has a following of teachers, researchers, and specialists who are almost fanatical in their observance of this teaching method. The debate is between two types of direct instruction: the "atomistic" approach encourages teachers to break down reading into its component parts; the "holistic" approach preaches that teachers should teach reading in the context of a child's natural language and interests. Teachers should take an integrative approach that includes the best of both worlds. Suggestions for reading teachers include: (1) use a variety of methods; (2) when students have problems, find with which method the child has the most success; (3) try new things; (4) teach the reading of nonfiction; (5) demonstrate that reading and writing are tools for communication; and (6) keep up on their own reading and writing. Teachers should not: embrace any one method to the exclusion of others; close their minds to new, innovative, or even older methods of instruction; hoard their ideas; give up on any student having trouble reading; and assume they know whether or not their students are learning. Teachers should never forget that reading is not the most important skill in the world: a child is not doomed to failure just because he or she cannot read. (RS)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED356467

"Whole"-ier Than Thou!

Janna Siegel, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor of Special Education

Eastern New Mexico University

Station 25

Portales, New Mexico 88130

Spring, 1993

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

CS011379

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Janna Siegal

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

"Whole"-ier Than Thou!

I have often been amused by how the passing trends in education are often embraced with fervor and proclaimed to be "the answer" to the teaching of reading. No trend has been exalted more than "whole language" which currently has a following of teachers, researchers, and specialists who are almost fanatical in their observance of this teaching method. Whole language followers often only have scorn for teachers who still instruct their students in word attack skills, and have not yet seen "the light" of teaching solely in context.

Although I am a proponent of using whole language approaches, I do not believe a teacher must convert completely to this method in order to benefit their students. As a special educator, I have been encouraged to believe that students learn in different ways, and the best teachers have a repertoire of instructional methods. A good friend of mine (Dr. Nile Stanley) is fond of saying, "Eclectic is electric" . Although I'm not exactly sure what he means by this, I assume that he is endorsing having eclectic approaches to teaching reading rather than limiting teaching to only one method.

The debate is really between two types of direct instruction. The "atomistic" approach encourages teachers to break down reading into its component parts. This behaviorally derived philosophy has generated the instructional methods of phonics,

structural analysis, and sight word memorization. The common denominator to all atomistic methods is a "skill centered" approach that uses a scope and sequence of vocabulary and reading skills which are doled out to students in an arbitrary, regulated fashion. Since contrived vocabularies are used and oral reading is emphasized, often the interest and relevance levels of these materials are low.

The other type of direct instruction is using an "holistic" approach. This cognitively derived philosophy preaches that teachers should teach reading in context of a child's natural language and interests. The "whole language" methods that have been derived from this view include language immersion approaches, writing to read programs, and high interest novels and subject matter. These programs often do not teach words in isolation but instead concentrate on teaching words in context using a "meaning centered" approach. They also concentrate more on silent reading and re-telling of stories. The holistic belief is that reading is more than just the sum of it's parts.

Although I understand the attractiveness of using a holistic approach, I do know that many students have learned to read even when their teachers used a more atomistic method of reading instruction. Let us not discard successful methods just because a "new method" has become the fashion.

Ironically, there is nothing new about "whole language" . The language experience approach by Roach and Van Allen is one example of a holistic method that has been around since the 1940's . Sylvia Ashton-Warner wrote about using holistic techniques in her classic book Teacher written in 1962. Teachers have often encouraged students to read books about their interests. I am convinced that good reading teachers have been using variations of holistic contextual teaching along with their word attack instruction long before "whole language" was even an established method.

I would like to advocate that teachers take an integrative approach which includes the best of both worlds. There is no reason why some of the skills of reading, could not be included into whole language instruction. For example, many of us still use structural analysis to decode new words (ie: root words, prefixes and suffixes). Why should we deprive our students of the same strategies?

The following are my suggestions for reading teachers and their choice of methods.

Do's:

1. Use a variety of methods. Keep Eclectic!
2. When a student has problems learning to read, try to find which method the child has the most success.
3. Try new things, take risks.

4. Find written material that interests the child. (Their choices may not interest you!)
5. Teach reading of non-fiction as well as fiction. There are different skills required for reading different genres.
6. Make sure your students acquire strategies of how to figure out unfamiliar words.
7. Try to make sure your students have reasons to read, rather than just because you gave them an assignment. An example may be to find out information on a topic of interest (research).
8. Incorporate the arts in your instruction. There are many ties between literature and art, music, and drama.
9. Demonstrate that reading and writing are tools for communication. I tell my students that since it is too difficult to remember everything, writing and reading is how we record information for future use. (Kind of like cheating but in a positive way!)
10. Keep up on your own reading and writing. If you truly practice what you preach you will become a much more credible teacher.

Don'ts:

1. Do not embrace any one method to the exclusion of others.
2. Do not close your mind to new, innovative, or even older methods of instruction. There is no one answer to teaching and learning.

3. Do not berate other teachers for doing things differently. You have much to learn from each other!

4. Do not refuse to try something because some one else is already doing it. There is no glory in reinventing the wheel.

5. Do not hoard your good ideas to yourself, share them!

6. Do not give up on any student who has trouble reading. I do not believe that any teacher has ever "tried everything" so try something else.

7. Do not stop reading the new research that comes out. Keep learning, adapting, and improving so you will not "burn out"!

8. Do not throw away your school's basal reader. Even the worst materials can be successfully adapted with innovative instruction.

9. Do not assume you know whether or not the students are learning. Collect data, do continuous assessment, and keep tabs on the student's progress so you will know whether or not to make modifications.

10. And finally, do not forget that reading is not the most important skill in the world. I am aware that this is a radical statement for a reading article but we tend to overemphasize the importance of this skill in academia, despite the fact that there are many people who have lived full and productive lives without reading. I'm not saying it is not important, but a child is not doomed to failure just because they cannot read.

References

Ashton-Warner, S. (1963). Teacher. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Hammill, D. D. & Bartel, N. R. (1990). Teaching students with learning and behavior problems. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Iano, R. P. (1986). The study and development of teaching. Remedial and Special Education, 7, (5). 50-61.

Poplin, M. (1988). Holistic/constructivist principles of the teaching/learning process. Journal of Learning Disabilities, 21, (7), 401-416.